



Virginia Department of Social Services

Biannual Report

2002-2004

MESSAGE FROM THE COMMISSIONER



“Our strategic plan sets goals, and establishes measures and strategies to reach those goals.”

“At all times it keeps the clients we serve at the forefront.”

The Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) experienced significant successes in fiscal years 2002-04 that have helped us better serve those in need in the Commonwealth despite some substantial challenges.

We entered the biennium facing budget reductions. We ended it with a state-wide strategic roadmap in place that will lead us and our partners – the 120 local agencies and 26 community action agencies across the state – through the next three years.

What were some of the successes achieved by working with our partners?

- VDSS met our budget challenges by restructuring and developing new and more efficient ways of doing business.
- We were awarded a \$922,000 bonus for increasing the number of children adopted from state-supervised foster care and a \$2 million grant to improve adoption results in rural areas.
- We completed the Child and Family Services Review and have a Program Improvement Plan in place to enhance services to children and families.
- We established a new Web-based eligibility screening to help state residents determine if they may be eligible for public assistance. Nearly 6,000 people now use the online screening each month. This screening is evolving into an online application for benefits and services.
- VDSS received an extra \$4.65 million to help low-income families with increased heating costs resulting from the severe cold weather last winter. Nearly \$58 million was allotted to low-income Virginians for heating and cooling during the past two years.
- We embraced Information Technology Investment Management (ITIM), and began enhancing and streamlining our systems to improve the delivery of services.
- Virginia received \$28.1 million in federal incentives for our success in child support collection efforts. More than \$1 billion was collected in 2002-04, and we continue to promote the importance of fathers being involved in the lives of their children.
- VDSS received a \$15.8 million high-performance bonus for placing welfare recipients in jobs.
- Virginia increased the number of eligible households receiving food stamp benefits, which are 100 percent federally funded, from more than 356,000 people in nearly 160,000 households at the beginning of the biennium to 463,000 people in more than 204,000 households.
- We are working to improve our results in recognizing, reporting and halting adult abuse, neglect and exploitation so our elderly and incapacitated citizens have a more productive and better quality of life.
- Virginia helped resettle refugees fleeing famine, war and persecution in their home lands. Nearly 2,000 people were resettled to Virginia during the biennium.
- Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT), providing food stamp benefits on a card similar to a “debit” card, was rolled out statewide and the contract for financial services was renegotiated saving \$2 million through 2006.

- We increased minority hiring and more minorities are employed now than at any time in the agency's history. The agency staff now has 43 percent minority representation, and 23 percent are agency officials and administrators.
- We developed enhanced standards for child care centers, and we awarded more than 4,700 scholarships to child care providers.

These are some of the biennium's numbers, and they are impressive successes. You will read about more successes in the pages that follow. Yet, these successes don't always tell the human story of our work.

For example, the bonus for increasing the number of children adopted was received because permanent homes were found for 496 children who were in foster care. Typically, that many children would fill an elementary school. These children have been adopted by families that will provide them with care, stability and love.

As another example, moving a single mother to self-sufficiency means she has gainful employment, increased self-esteem and the opportunity to break the cycle of welfare in her family. This has happened over and over in Virginia in recent years.

This is important work, and these are significant accomplishments. These accomplishments tell us that the work we do can positively impact the lives of individuals and families across the Commonwealth. We must continue this essential work.

What's ahead?

I believe we have many challenges and opportunities.

We must continue to enhance the independence, well-being and personal responsibility of citizens. We must ensure more seamless access to benefits and services.

We must streamline the work opportunity tax credit, roll out an online application for assistance and implement subsidized employment initiatives for those who receive benefits.

We must enhance regulations for assisted living facilities, while we work to implement regulations we've proposed to enhance the quality of child care. We must carry out the strategies we've developed to improve programs that impact at-risk children, adults and families.

We must work to increase our funding pool. We must measure our results to show we offer value-added services deserving of funding, while ensuring quality management in our programs and services.

We must grow a trained, innovative and dedicated workforce with succession training.

These are lofty goals, but they are goals that we have in common with our partners in the Virginia Social Services System – goals we will work together to achieve. Our partners have joined us to establish a strategic plan to work toward these common goals. Our strategic plan sets goals, and establishes measures and strategies to reach those goals. At all times, it keeps the clients we serve at the forefront. That's the human side of our work and it's reflected in our mission: People helping people triumph over poverty, abuse and neglect to shape strong futures for themselves, their families and communities.

Maurice A. Jones

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Commissioner, Virginia Department of Social Services
Deputy Chief of Staff, Office of the Governor

"These accomplishments tell us that the work we do can positively impact the lives of individuals and families across the Commonwealth. We must continue this essential work."

HELPING FAMILIES



“Perhaps the greatest social service that can be rendered by anybody to the country and to mankind is to bring up a family.”

- George Bernard Shaw
(1856-1950)

During the last two years, an estimated one-fourth of the 7.5 million families throughout the Commonwealth have, at some point, utilized the vital services and programs offered by VDSS and its local agency partners.

Some families needed help to get through a crisis; some to get back on their feet.

Without social services, many more families would be at serious risk of poverty or homelessness. Ask any member of these families and they will tell you how critical these social services are to their well-being and future self-sufficiency.

The largest VDSS program specifically designed to help families is Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). TANF provides invaluable support for families struggling to gain self-sufficiency and strives to keep children in their homes, helps parents with job preparation and promotes two-parent families.

In 2002-04, VDSS allocated a total of \$159 million in TANF funding for services and programs throughout the Commonwealth.

The TANF program provides more than cash assistance; in Virginia, TANF funds the Virginia Independence Program (VIP). VIP symbolizes the fundamental principles of welfare reform, which emphasize personal responsibility. It is carried out at the local level through Virginia Initiative for Employment not Welfare (VIEW) programs.

What's the impact?

After VIEW was implemented in 1995, the number of TANF cases declined by 59 percent – from nearly 70,000 cases per month to under 30,000 – by June 2001. In the past two years, there has been some upward movement in the number of TANF cases but nothing near the level prior to welfare reform. The TANF caseload at the end of the 2002-04 fiscal years was near the 35,000-per-month mark.

VIEW encourages self-sufficiency by requiring TANF recipients to begin working within 90 days of receipt of cash assistance. Since VIEW was implemented, more than 100,000 individuals enrolled in VIEW and 74 percent of those enrolled – or nearly 75,000 – have participated in a work activity. Five months later, 58 percent were in employment. The average wage increased from \$5.80 per hour to \$6.85. Job preparation and readiness programs are available to assist participants throughout this process.

VDSS also has made strides in efficiency. Eligibility requirements have been standardized across assistance programs to reduce the burden on local workers and to more efficiently serve clients. For example, in the past, a car may have been valued differently to determine eligibility for food stamps versus TANF. Under the new guidelines, value determination is standardized. One process was streamlined to automatically enroll families receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) in the energy assistance program, eliminating the need for families to apply individually for every benefit.

The state allocated nearly \$58 million in federal funding for heating, cooling and crisis assistance through the Energy Assistance Program in 2002-04. This funding was especially important to low-income families and individuals because of the severe weather extremes experienced in the biennium.

Food stamp benefits serve an important role in helping families meet their nutritional needs. VDSS partnered with the Federation of Virginia Food Banks to create the Virginia Nutrition Assistance Network to increase participation in the food stamp program and

to make it easier for low-income households to take part in other nutrition assistance programs. In 2002-04, food stamp benefits issued totaled \$723 million. The number of households receiving benefits each month increased from approximately 160,000 to nearly 204,000 during the two-year period as efforts continue to increase participation.

September 2003 brought unique challenges as VDSS and 53 local departments of social services impacted by Hurricane Isabel quickly implemented the federally funded disaster food stamp program. Nearly 548,000 people in more than 194,000 households received \$56 million in federal disaster food stamp benefits within weeks of the disaster. This assistance enabled low-income households that met eligibility requirements to put food on their tables and avoid the financial burden of replacing spoiled food when electricity was out for days.

Food stamp benefits are delivered via a debit-card system – Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) – which is more convenient and efficient for recipients, grocers, local social services agencies and VDSS. The EBT card program was implemented across the state in 2002 and eliminated paper food stamp coupons.

Additionally, VDSS partnered with the Virginia Department of Health to administer the Medicaid and the Family Access to Medical Insurance Security (FAMIS) programs. This partnership has resulted in the enrollment of more than 90,000 children into FAMIS during the last two years. Medical costs are the cause of half of all bankruptcies in the United States. Without the strain of medical expenses, children and families enrolled in FAMIS and Medicaid are able to work toward self-sufficiency while retaining health care.

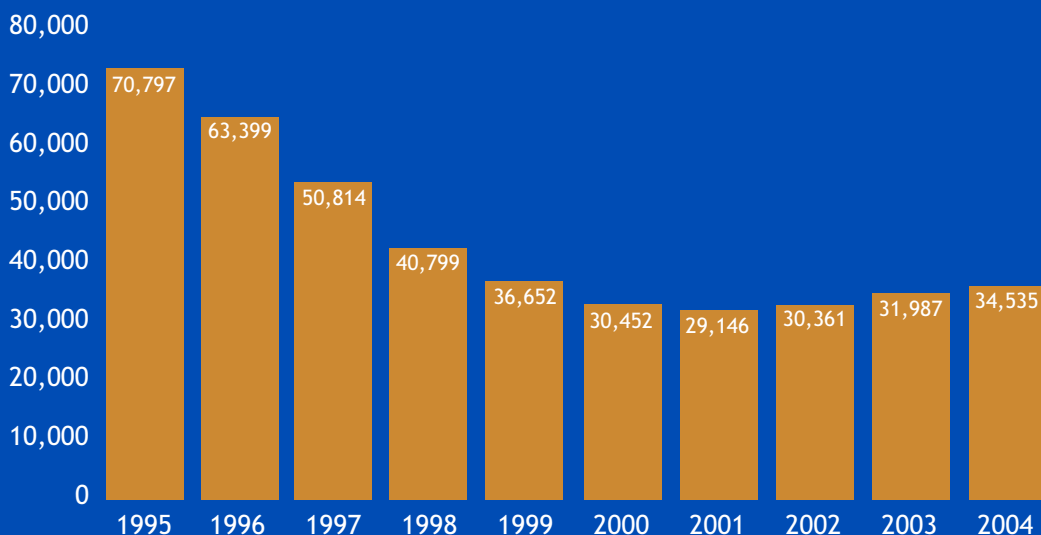
VDSS programs benefit refugees, also called newcomers, from all over the world. Health screenings, employment services, English language training, limited cash assistance and more were provided to nearly 2,000 newcomers who settled in Virginia during the biennium.

These services and many more offered by VDSS and its partners enhanced the stability of families in the Commonwealth.

2002-04 Successes

- 44,000 more eligible Virginian households are receiving federally funded food stamp benefits than were two years ago as VDSS strives to distribute these federally funded benefits to families in need.
- Approximately 33,000 households, one-third of those receiving benefits, were automatically enrolled for fuel assistance.
- An online preliminary screening was developed to permit citizens to determine whether they may be eligible for TANF, food stamps, child care assistance, energy assistance, Medicaid, FAMIS and Women, Infants and Children (WIC).

TANF caseload after VIEW implementation



HELPING CHILDREN



“We find the beauty and happiness of children that which makes the heart too big for the body.”

- Ralph Waldo Emerson
(1803-1882)

Protecting children; finding safe, stable and loving homes for children in need; and ensuring that both parents support their children are ways VDSS helped the Commonwealth's youngest citizens in 2002-04.

Ensuring the immediate physical, mental and emotional safety of children is a priority. VDSS operates a statewide 24 hour-a-day, seven-days-a-week hotline to receive reports of suspected child and adult abuse and neglect. More than 130,000 calls were received during the 2002-04 biennium.

When children are found to be abused or neglected and intervention is required, the child welfare system takes over. Virginia's system underwent the federal Child and Family Services Review and has developed improvement plans to enhance services to at-risk children, including protective services, foster care and adoption.

With the goal of allowing a child to remain in the stability of his or her home unless there is immediate concern for the child's safety, the differential response system (DRS) was implemented statewide during the 2002-04 biennium. It allows alternatives to removal from the home. It permits investigators to respond to a valid claim of child maltreatment through either an investigation or a family assessment. Prior to DRS, every valid claim of abuse required an investigation – causing undue intrusion and stress on the family structure even when there was no immediate concern for child safety. Under DRS, formal investigations are reserved for the most serious instances of abuse.

Taking into consideration the severity of the report, family assessments now are conducted in nearly 55 percent of child abuse and neglect reports. Through assessments, families are provided with the services they need to prevent child abuse and neglect, and child and safety needs are met in a proactive way.

A structured decision making model also is being implemented throughout the state that will improve consistency and structure in the judgments of social workers. Resources are provided to families most at risk.

The list of mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect was expanded during the biennium to include teachers and other professionals. VDSS developed online training on signs of abuse for teachers. In just three months after implementation of the online training, more than 10,000 teachers were certified. In addition, curriculum was developed for new teachers entering the workforce so they are aware of signs of abuse and their role as mandated reporters.

There are times when the child's safety is at risk and the child must be removed from the home. Foster care programs provide a temporary home for children in turmoil.

In Virginia, more than 7,600 children are in foster care at any given time. Since foster care is designed to be temporary, VDSS and its local partners work to reunite these children with their parents or other family members, or, if necessary, find alternative homes through adoption.

Concurrent planning is being implemented by VDSS in cooperation with local agencies and other partners. Concurrent planning permits foster care staff to work toward family reunification while, at the same time, develop an alternative family plan in case reunification is not possible. Five local agencies successfully piloted concurrent planning and nearly 20 agencies are expected to have concurrent planning in place within the next 12 months. Concurrent planning is designed to move children through the foster care system and into permanency more quickly, decrease the number of foster care placements and reduce the number of children in long-term foster care.

When children cannot be reunited with their parents or relatives, adoption becomes the next option. Concurrent planning also will play a pivotal role in reaching adoption goals. By making children in foster care eligible for adoption in a timelier manner, children will be able to move from foster care into permanent homes in less time. Nearly 1,000 children in foster care were adopted through agency placements in the 2002-04 biennium.

While the highest priority is given to the safety and stability of children in Virginia, an equally high priority is given to ensuring that children are able to escape poverty and maintain a comfortable standard of living through the financial support of both parents.

Children raised in two-parent families are less likely to live in poverty, more likely to do well in school and half as likely to be involved in crime. While many programs of VDSS are designed to encourage two-parent households and reduce out-of-wedlock births, the reality is that nearly one third of children live with only one parent.

Child support enforcement efforts at VDSS assure the financial support of children when parents live separately. When parents contribute financially, they are more likely to contribute emotionally. The children benefit.

VDSS collected more than \$1 billion in child support during the 2002-04 biennium. During that time, the VDSS child support enforcement team located 266,136 addresses and/or assets for non-custodial parents and established nearly 19,000 paternities.

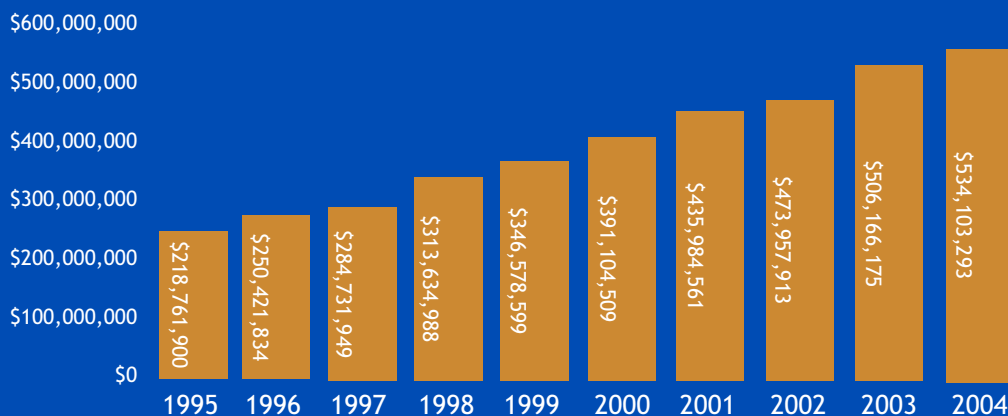
The state continues to maintain a low percentage of undistributed child support collections, consistently below 2 percent. Distributions of child support payments within 48 hours exceeded 99 percent. VDSS exceeds federal incentive cost-effectiveness guidelines of \$5 collected for every \$1 spent by collecting \$6.99 for every \$1 spent. Child support enforcement efforts continue to win federal grants for improving child support services to all family members.

Through these and other programs, VDSS is helping children in the Commonwealth.

2002-04 Successes

- VDSS earned \$28.1 million in incentives for child support enforcement efforts.
- Virginia received a \$2 million grant to implement a rural adoptive family initiative.
- Nearly 1,000 children in foster care were adopted into permanent, safe and loving homes.

Child support collections



HELPING ADULTS



“You don’t live
in a world all
your own. Your
brothers are
here too.”

-Albert Schweitzer
(1875-1965)

At some time in an adult’s life, he or she may need assistance. While we expect adults to be independent and self-sufficient, circumstances sometimes result in calls for help from those having difficulties.

VDSS helps adults in many ways. Adult programs provide protection, empowerment and the opportunity for independence for adults through a strong focus on self-reliance and family-focused, community-based services. Those served primarily are seniors 60 and older, adults aged 18 and older who have a disability, and survivors of domestic violence.

Today, nearly one of every seven Virginians (approximately 11 percent) is 60 years of age or older. Citizens age 85 and over are the fastest growing segment of the Commonwealth’s population, and 20 percent of the state’s residents will be over age 60 by 2025. That population is growing, and with the growing population of elderly adults come increased exposure to abuse, neglect and exploitation. VDSS wants to help protect a vulnerable adult’s life, health and property in the least restrictive environment possible.

During the 2002-04 biennium, there were nearly 23,000 reports of adult abuse, neglect and exploitation in Virginia. Of those, approximately 14,300 were substantiated. These cases were investigated and action was taken or services offered to protect the adults involved.

A nationally recognized financial exploitation reporting program was implemented to train staff at financial institutions to recognize signs of financial exploitation of the elderly and to avert unauthorized withdrawals from their accounts. Since the training began, there has been a 300 percent increase in the reporting of adult financial exploitation by financial institutions.

This year, the list of professions that are mandated reporters of adult abuse was expanded. An adult fatality review team is being formed to further strengthen the ability to review suspicious deaths and develop a database to better protect vulnerable citizens.

Another goal is to assist seniors to remain in less restrictive environments, such as their homes, rather than move to institutions. In the biennium, nearly 11,000 persons received home-based companion, chore and homemaker services through local departments of social services.

VDSS licensed and inspected nearly 640 assisted living facilities providing care for more than 34,000 residents across the state. Sixty-nine adult day care facilities, which serve more than 2,000 adults, were licensed and inspected. Another 146 adults were placed in approved adult foster care homes.

Auxiliary grants provided additional income for recipients of Supplemental Security Income and certain others who are aged, blind or have a disability residing in a licensed assisted living facility or an approved adult foster care home. These grants ensure that recipients are able to maintain a standard of living that meets their basic level of need.

More than 300,000 working-age Virginians have a health condition, impairment or disability that limits their daily activities. VDSS helps persons with disabilities by providing many of the same services that are provided for the elderly.

More than 80,000 calls were made to the Virginia Family Violence/Sexual Assault Hotline in the biennium. VDSS awarded more than \$16 million in the past two fiscal years for domestic violence prevention services across Virginia.

These VDSS programs are in place for adults – because sometimes they need help, too.

HELPING COMMUNITIES

For most people, maintaining self-sufficiency – a career, a home, a family, a productive life – is something they do every day and something they take for granted. Their self-sufficiency makes their communities stronger. However, for many, gaining and maintaining self-sufficiency isn't so easy.

VDSS works closely with its local partners to help welfare recipients find and maintain employment on their road to self-sufficiency. VDSS programs help with education and/or training, transportation and affordable child care. These efforts, and others, help communities as a whole.

TANF and food stamp funds, in addition to providing financial assistance, provide job training and other services to help those who receive welfare work toward self-sufficiency. TANF recipients who are able to work are required to enroll in the VIEW program, while individuals who receive only food stamps who are able to work are enrolled in the Food Stamp Employment and Training (FSET) program. These and other welfare-to-work programs helped move many individuals and families from welfare to self-sufficiency.

Job training and finding employment are major first steps, but adequate transportation, health care, affordable housing and affordable child care are crucial issues.

Retention-related work support payments assisted individuals working in unsubsidized employment. These payments, to individuals who had been employed for at least three months and worked 20 hours per week, pay for uniforms, child care, meals at work or transportation.

Transportation services to help individuals get to and from their jobs also are provided through TANF and other programs. Even after recipients stop getting TANF assistance, transportation is provided for up to one year to ensure they are able to get back on their feet and succeed without the burden of obtaining transportation.

The cost of child care alone can be one of the greatest hurdles toward maintaining employment. For parents earning less than a living wage, finding affordable child care is difficult. VDSS provided grants and subsidies to assist low-income families with child care during the biennium.

VDSS child care services totaling more than \$238 million were provided to approximately 113,732 children in 2002-04. VDSS conducted 512 training sessions on 68 different topics and trained more than 16,000 child care providers in the biennium.

All families and all communities need top quality early care and education. Foundations for a Lifetime, which focuses on children ages 0-5, is the agency's portion of Governor Mark R. Warner's Education for a Lifetime initiative. The 0-5 initiative focuses on children prior to school entry. The VDSS initiative includes: New Parent Kits; an information line on early childhood development resources; a public awareness campaign; increased access to affordable, quality child care through child care subsidy payment rates; coordinated professional development for child care providers; and competitive grants to localities to assist in developing local infrastructures to support seamless quality early education and care for children 0-5.

These projects are under way and will be fully implemented in the next 18 months.

To ensure that child care facilities are safe, VDSS inspects and licenses nearly 5,000 facilities that are licensed to provide care for nearly 250,000 children.

VDSS also coordinates the licensure of children's residential facilities with four other state departments and is working to update standards.

Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) programs also make communities stronger. Nearly \$21 million was provided to local community action agencies to leverage more



"Treat people as if they were what they ought to be, and you will help them to become what they are capable of being."

- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832)

2002-04 Successes

- More than 270,000 callers were assisted through the Statewide Information & Referral hotline.
- An online training calendar was developed for child care providers.

than \$200 million more from other federal, state, local and private sources. The network of agencies served more than 100,000 people in each year of the biennium through programs such as education, employment services, emergency assistance, community and economic development, Head Start and health care.

VDSS also partnered with the Virginia Community Action Partnership (formerly the Virginia Council Against Poverty) to help low-income families and individuals learn about and take advantage of state and federal tax credits for which they are eligible. It is estimated that between \$60 to \$160 million in federal low-income tax credits are unclaimed each year. Bringing this money into the state will help low-income individuals and families. It also will benefit the businesses and communities where the tax refunds are spent.

The Neighborhood Assistance Tax Credit Program provided more than \$10.3 million and expects to authorize another \$2-3 million for the biennium in tax credits to local businesses that contributed to approved non-profit organizations helping low-income citizens in a variety of ways. Business that hired VIEW participants also received tax credits. The result is a higher likelihood of finding employment for someone without a successful work history.

Virginia ranked fourth in the country in the biennium for placing TANF participants into unsubsidized jobs and has been nationally recognized for its efforts.

These successes help families and individuals achieve independence from assistance and build better and stronger communities.

Follow-up is essential. To focus on job retention and wage advancement, grants to local departments of social services are offered for creative solutions to fund additional job training and job skills programs; to determine barriers to work; and to develop employer networks to help at-risk individuals obtain and maintain employment.

VDSS also implemented the faith-based initiative in 2002-04. Regional conferences were held to provide information to faith-based organizations on how to compete for funding. A network of liaisons was established to assist faith-based and other service groups in linking with public agencies and funding.

Virginia Community Corps, a statewide AmeriCorps program that is a national model for partnership between federal, state and local government, and the non-profit sector, was implemented. Fifty-three volunteers were placed in 28 organizations. Through other programs, volunteers were mobilized across Virginia and provided with information and tools to help strengthen their communities.

Access to the Statewide Information & Referral System hotline is being made easier through the implementation of a 2-1-1 telephone number. Like 9-1-1 for emergencies and 4-1-1 for information, 2-1-1 will provide an easier-to-remember number that can help connect those who need health and human services with providers in their communities. Planning got under way during the biennium and piloting of 2-1-1 is expected in 2005 in the Roanoke area.

VDSS strives to create and foster self-sufficiency through these programs and many more. The positive changes in the lives of individuals and assistance to localities help make communities stronger.

HELPING OUR PARTNERS

Virginia's social services system is state-supervised and locally administered to deliver direct assistance to the Commonwealth's diverse communities. VDSS is the state agency that works closely with the 120 local departments of social services and 26 community action agencies to help localities ensure that services are delivered in a timely and efficient manner to those in need.

To help local agencies during the biennium and today, VDSS develops and interprets policy for programs and services, provides technical assistance, helps hire and train local agency staff, provides information systems, monitors legislation and provides other support services that help state and local staff deliver services.

The biennium saw many successes in these support areas.

A plan for performance-based training was developed and a contract signed with the Virginia Institute for Social Services Training Activities at Virginia Commonwealth University to deliver training to 12,000 state and local employees across the state. New training labs with computer stations were established. A new learning management system is being implemented to track registration and training. VDSS is working to make training more uniform, offered more frequently and available in more locations so local agency staff can attend without traveling long distances and incurring overnight travel expenses.

VDSS helps local agencies seek alternative funding for programs in their communities and obtain federal reimbursement for money spent by a locality not previously claimed for federal reimbursement.

VDSS helps local departments of social services by printing, purchasing, distributing and storing forms, manuals, booklets and brochures used by local agencies. During the biennium, most forms were placed online.

The state agency provides local agencies with assistance in all aspects of personnel management, including classification and compensation, recruitment, screening and selection, employee transactions, workers compensation and employee relations. VDSS develops and administers personnel policies and procedures.

VDSS manages regulatory and legislative processes, ensuring that policies and procedures are consistent with federal and state law.

Services are provided citizens when they believe local agencies may have erred in making decisions regarding their benefits, and those agencies and citizens making appeals are provided fair and impartial hearings.

Information systems and computers are provided by VDSS for local agency staff. Progress was made toward the implementation of an integrated information system for the state and local departments to use in delivering programs and services in the biennium. Web-based information sharing was expanded.

VDSS collaborates with local agencies and boards to promote high performance and quality customer service, assesses program performance, recommend best practices and help local agencies develop effective internal monitoring and control processes.

The biennium saw VDSS restructure to develop a single, more seamless state organization to support service delivery to local departments. A local teams concept was developed and is being piloted.

The Virginia Department of Social Services supports local agencies to enable them to support individuals and families in their communities.



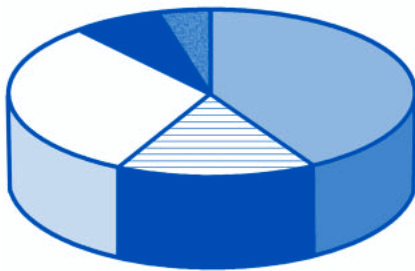
"A partnership, by definition, serves both partners, without domination or unfair advantage. Together we have been partners in adversity - let us also be partners in prosperity."

- John Fitzgerald Kennedy
(1917-1963)

FINANCES AT-A-GLANCE 2002-04

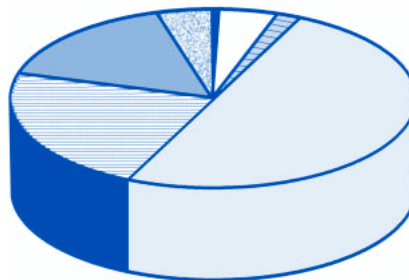
Income (millions)

Federal Funds	\$1,425.6
State General Funds	\$548.9
Earned Funds	\$1,048.5
Local Match	\$251.0
In-Kind Match	\$148.3
Total	\$3,422



Expenditures (millions)

Licensing	\$22.6
Adult Services	\$153.9
Child Services	\$72.5
Family Stability	\$1,702.2
Financial and Medical Assistance	\$770.3
Self-Sufficiency	\$548.3
State Support	\$152.5
Total	\$3,422



“People helping people triumph over poverty, abuse and neglect to shape strong futures for themselves, their families and communities”